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BY LAWRENCE L. KNUTSON
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The Senate today narrowly defeated an attempt by Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., to create a National Commission on Espionage and Security to review the nation's counter-intelligence efforts in the wake of recent spy scandals.

Byrd's amendment to the fiscal 1985 supplemental appropriations bill was defeated, 50-48, after Republican senators said its work would conflict with the duties of the Senate and House intelligence committees.

Byrd proposed establishing an eight-member commission that would conduct an 18-month examination of the nation's counter-intelligence apparatus, a task Byrd said is long overdue.

Byrd said he discussed his idea with a wide range of present and former government leaders _ including former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Richard Nixon _ and found agreement.

"They all feel time is a-wasting," Byrd said.

The Democratic leader was joined in his appeal by Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, who also noted the recent Walker family spy case.

"Nothing short of a laxative has crept into the security system," Stevens said.

The Alaska Republican also said the measure is not a partisan one and is not aimed at anyone or any administration. After its defeat, he told the Senate that the amendment will be re-offered at a later date and in another form.

When asked by reporters about the idea, Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole, R-Kan., said, "I'm a little leery of commissions." He wondered aloud whether the Senate committees charged with overseeing intelligence and counter-intelligence could not do the task described by Byrd.

And Sen. David Durenberger, R-Minn., chairman of the Senate intelligence panel, attacked the whole idea, saying "some of the great mistakes in the past have been made by commissions and by agencies ... without any responsibility to anybody."

The proposed commission would have had four members appointed by the president. Byrd suggested that a former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, a former secretary of defense and a former national security adviser be among them, but deleted language that would have required the president to include such persons. The Senate would have appointed two members and the House two members of the group.